



AL-MAKTABAH

Interview with Abū Talḥah al-Amrīkī

CONDUCTED BY AARON Y. ZELIN

EXHIBIT A8

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(1) Could you provide a brief biographical sketch?

I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia. I moved to Columbia, Missouri when I was about 3 years old. I remained in Missouri until I was 10 years old when I moved Northern Virginia. I was somewhat of a goth for a brief period in middle school, but I decided it did not fit my personality before I went to high school.

In elementary school and middle school I was in a program, which required me to be bused to schools outside of my area.

In high school I played football and basketball my freshman year and I stuck with mostly the kids who were in the same program as I was in elementary and middle school. The next year I played JV basketball only and found a new group of friends (this was sort of a common trend for me throughout high school, but there were some people who remained consistent through the entire period).

My junior year I tried crew (rowing) instead of basketball, because I was pretty confident I would not make varsity. I also started break dancing at this point, which I stopped after becoming Muslim. I also began hanging out with a more social and athletic crowd during this period. I dressed up as Buzz Lightyear for Halloween and walked around school like that for kicks. I turned out to be very good at crew and began to view it as an avenue to potentially enter an Ivy League school.

My senior year I participated in "Powder Puff" cheer leading which was something where the girls in the school would play one game of football against each other while the guys did the cheer leading. I don't know if they do this at other schools in the country, but it is common in Northern Virginia. There is probably some video floating around of me rapping and another one of me break dancing at a talent show thing we had that year as well. I do not like any of those things, but that is reality, and in sha'a Allah nothing before Islaam will count against me on the Day of Judgment.

I also visited Japan with my Japanese class (I took 4 years of Japanese) during the spring break.

I did not take my senior year seriously at all. I remember my calculus teacher lecturing me just about every single day about how I was wasting my time in her class. I failed her class with something like a 28%, but I passed the Advanced Placement exam and received college credit for it.

Before the year began I broke my ankle, which pretty much shattered my hopes at going to a top tier school for crew. My erg (a machine used to train for rowing) times were still good enough that I was still lightly recruited by tier two schools.

Temple is essentially the best school in the second tier for crew, and I got into Temple academically. I also got into George Mason and I was accepted into their honors program. I accepted Temple and turned down George Mason, because I wanted to be on

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Temple's crew team. However, eventually I decided I was not good enough to make Temple's team as a walk-on, so I tried to accept George Mason after the deadline. They held a few meetings and re-accepted me and rejected me a couple of times each, but eventually they let me in without being in the honors program. Half way through the summer Temple sent me a letter suggesting I join their crew team, but by this time I had realized that I only did crew because I was somewhat good at it and I did not actually enjoy it.

I became Muslim in either August or July of 2008 and got married in March of 2009. My first son was born this past November on the day of Arafat and we named him Talhah.

Go ahead and summarize anything from that which you would like as it is a bit long. The Fox News article about me is accurate, but it only really addresses my life in 8th grade.

(2) When and why did you decide to convert to Islam? When and why did you join Revolution Muslim? What are its end goals?

I became Muslim after reading the first 4 chapters of a translation of the Qu'ran. I began reading it somewhat on my own and somewhat due to some Muslims I knew. My high school was something like 10% Muslim, but almost none of them were attached to the religion particularly. In America, usually people do not start learning more about Islam until they get out of high school.

I became Muslim almost exactly 2 years ago around the first of Sha'baan.

I joined Revolution Muslim in late January 2010, because I saw that they were linking to some of my videos and they had mentioned that they would like to work with me on their website. I actually did not know about them until they started linking to my videos.

RM seeks to help the Muslims defend themselves from both the kuffaar (disbelievers) and kufr (disbelief) through political analysis and education as well as religious education. I am no longer with them due to the attention it brought and the need to focus on more important things. Most of what I have done lately is not tied to me by name, and that is better for one's intentions.

(3) Why did you choose the *kunya* "Abu Talhah"? Is it after Talhah ibn 'Ubayd Allah? If so, how do you reconcile his rebellion, along with 'A'isha and Ibn al-Zubayr, against the caliph of that time, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib?

I named my son Talhah after Talhah bin 'Ubaidullah, because he was the fifth person in a narration when the Prophet, salaa Allahu calaihi wa salam, listed the best of the companions. He was right after 'Ali bin Abi Taalib on this list. Very few people know his name, so I figured it would be good to remind them of this great companion. He also suffered dozens of wounds defending the Prophet, salaa Allahu calaihi wa salam, on the day of Uhud. The war between the Saxaabah was due to differing interpretations of a

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situation, and Talhah and Az-Zubair initially chose the wrong side. It was their ijtihaad and the mujtahid who makes ijtihaad and errs will be rewarded one time for their ijtihaad and the one who is correct will be rewarded both for their ijtihaad and for being correct.

Aishah is defended specifically in the Qur'an and 'Ali named one son Abu Bakr, two sons 'Umar, and two sons 'Uthman which is enough to refute the concept of Shi'ism.

(4) What is the just society you want to create? What is the general outline of the "Islamic" state that you believe should be established today?

I hope to take part in the creation of an Islaamic state where the Shari'ah is applied in sha'a Allah with no exceptions of general matters of which there is a consensus. That is the bare minimum. After that I would hope that it is a just society where the law is applied and where the people are treated fairly. The leader should not place himself above his subjects, and he should not abuse their property.

I would hope and strive for a state similar to the ones when the Sahaabah were in control.

(5) Which books, newspapers, blogs, he have you read recently including non-jihadi texts?

As far as Islaamic books, then I just finished re-reading "The Sealed Nectar" which is a biography of the Prophet, salaa Allahu alaihi wa salam. I also recently re-read most of bin An-Nu'ayyash's book "Mashari' al-Ashwaq ila Mashari' al-Ushaq." In addition to these longer works I have read a number of shorter works on 'Aqidah (creed), jihaad, hijrah, and other subjects. I prefer reading older works, because the controversial issues of today were not controversial a long time ago. Also, older works tend to just simply be better than newer ones. This would all be in the last 3 months or so.

I also follow things on a number of Islaamic websites, but I do not think it is beneficial for them necessarily to have me mention them.

As far as news, then I usually try to read a variety of sources, but the consistent ones I go to are Garowe Online, Shabelle, Al-Jazeera English, Foreign Policy Magazine, and Al-Emarah (the Taliban website). I also use Twitter to follow a few journalists and specific news on terrorism and Afghanistan/Pakistan.

The blogs and websites I typically view are: Counter Terrorism Blog, Jamestown Foundation, Intel Wire, NEFA Foundation, SITE Intel Group, West Point CTC, and other counter terrorism websites.

I also visit a few websites, which seem to be tracking me for whatever reason.

(6) Who is the "first enemy"-- Islamic regimes that have allowed Western governments to usurp control of Muslim lands or the West itself, led by the US?

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The answer to this question would depend on where one is living, as the enemy, which is prioritized is the one which is nearest followed by the one which is the next nearest in Islaam. Not all of the West is an enemy militarily either.

If America would leave the Muslims to their own affairs and discontinue being the largest source of power for both Israel and the regimes which rule by other than the Shari'ah, then they would no longer be an enemy, but the other enemies would remain. 9/11 was the result of interpreting the situation in a manner that places the defeat or realigning of America as a necessity for the dealing with the regimes placed over the Muslims.

America is a nation of less evil, so in this sense it is a lesser enemy. However, it is an enemy of greater immediate consequences due to its militancy in the lands of the Muslims.

(7) Who can you work with in an alliance against the enemy -- examples: Shia Muslims, Iran, revolutionary in the West or other terrorist groups like the PKK?

That is a question for someone with more knowledge. Also, it depends on who one is fighting. Sometimes the Shari'ah mandates fighting a group of Muslims for various reasons. For example, some of the Khawaarij are Muslim, but we are ordered to fight against them due to the problems they cause.

(8) What do you think of the right to rebel against wrongful interpretations of scripture -- for example, Sheikh al-Qaradawi and the Muslim Brothers.

Ibn Taimiyyah, An-Nawawii, and others have mentioned that if a ruler is spreading innovation, then they should be rebelled against, but only if you have significantly superior forces. I do not know exactly which kinds of innovation mandate this, and I do not know when it should be done. I have no idea if Qaradawi and the Muslim Brotherhood should be rebelled against if they gain power. It would also depend on what they actually do when they gain power. A lot of Islamist movements abandon the Islaam part of their movements when they gain power. Allah knows best.

(9) What are your views of Shi'i Muslims? If you view them as non-Muslims, explain in detail why you believe this. What would happen to Shi'is in the type of "Islamic" state that you envision?

I do not know what is to be done with the Shi'a who are upon innovation and the ones who are upon disbelief in an Islaamic state. I think it is an area of difference of opinion if I am not mistaken, but I am in no way qualified to comment on that.

The Rafidah in Iran, Iraq, and elsewhere believe their Imams are superior to the Anbiya and this is kufr. Also, they attribute powers to their Imams that are only for Allah and this is kufr. They also say things such as Alii is al-Basiir, As-Samii', etc. which is kufr. They believe that the Sahaabah are kuffaar even though Allaah has said He is pleased with

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them in various places in the Qur'aan such as when He discusses the "bai'ah under the tree."

The Zaidiis are Muslim, and from what I know they are not even upon all that extreme of innovation.

The Fatimids are kuffaar, and even the Rawaafidh distance themselves from them. They believed that various people were even above Allaah in their attributes and this is kufr. I do not remember all of their beliefs, but they are the most extreme of the Shi'a.

I do not remember what the Shi'a in Syria believe from my lessons, but I remember it to be kufr of some sort.

Lastly, most scholars do not make takfir of the Shi'a in general due to the excuse of ignorance. If you talk to the average Shi'ii, then his knowledge of Shi'ism comprises of the knowledge that he likes 'Alii a lot and that he is a Shi'ii and that is it. Most of them do not even know about the things that the scholars from among them say, and they do not know the things in their books which are kufr.

(10) If Al-Qa'ida Central's military "*jihad*" is an individual requirement, why have you not taken up arms yourself? Do you see yourself as having another legitimate duty/role in this "*jihad*"? Is your failure to take up arms proof that you are simply an armchair warrior?

Simply leaving this country has been difficult enough for me so far. I am about to travel half way around the world to obtain a birth certificate in order to obtain a passport for a family member. An individual obligation on someone is in accordance with their abilities. If someone has the ability to fulfill an obligation, but they do not, then they are sinful. This applies to myself as well. The concept of jihaad being an obligation on the entire Ummah is not just something that Al-Qaa'idah mentions, but this is not an "Al-Qaa'idah" belief.

'Abdullah 'Azzam's fatwah which discusses the "General March (when jihaad is obligatory on everyone)" was signed by numerous scholars from all over the world. Even Bin B'az was supportive of it, and he was very reserved in matters of jihaad.

Ibn An-Nuxaas, a Shafi'ii scholar who died in the 814 year after hijra, states in *Mashari al-Ashwaaq*: "But if the enemy enters the Muslim land, or even approaches it and masses on its borders, even if they do not actually enter it, and there armies are double the size of that of the Muslims or less, then Jihad becomes mandatory on each and every individual. Then, the slave leaves without the permission of the master, the woman without the permission of her husband (if she has the strength to fight according to the stronger opinion), the son without the permission of the parents, and the one in debt without the permission of the lender. All of the above stated is the opinion of Imam Malik, Ahmad, and Abu Hanifah [and the opinion of Ash-Shafi'ii as the scholar is writing from Shafi'ii fiqh]."

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Al Qurtubi said: "Anyone who is aware of the weakness of the Muslims in the face of their enemy, knows that he can reach them and can assist them, it is also upon him to march forward."

Therefore if one is aware of the need for more soldiers and he is able to go, then it is obligatory upon him to leave.

(11) You have published in various *jihadi-takfiri* web forums analytical posts on counter terrorism and other issues. What do you hope to accomplish through these posts?

I would not call myself "takfiri." All Muslims make takfir, and the term "takfiri" is referring to those who make takfir without establishing a proof against somebody, or those who make takfir of things, which are not kufr.

I hope to help the Muslims in one way or another. I usually do not write on Islaam, because someone such as me is better suited to copying and pasting until they have more knowledge.

Sometimes my target audience is the Muslims, sometimes it is the non-Muslims, and sometimes it is both. My objective depends on the audience. Sometimes I might try to dispel some misconception about Islaam. I might try to provide a better picture of the situation on the ground in a particular region. Occasionally I write something completely with the intention of playing off of the egos of various counter terrorism analysts.

I was somewhat successful in building audiences and influencing them for a while, so I mostly share my experience and my thoughts regarding that. I might be mistaken, but my impression is that I was at one point operating the #1 jihaadii youtube channel in terms of daily views, as well as RM and my blog, which were both fairly successful al-xamdu lillah. It is no longer in my interests to do these things necessarily, so I share what I learned from it.

(12) In your understanding, what are the requirements of *takfir*?

Takfir requires first that it be a matter of kufr. Then it requires that the person is mentally capable of understanding this. Then they have to have been explained the nature of their statement or action and how it is kufr, or they have to be a person who would have come across this knowledge before (takfir cannot be made in matters of the heart, because only Allah knows them). The letters the Prophet, salaa Allahu calaihi wa salam, sent out to various rulers was considered a sufficient proof against them. Then you have to establish that the person is not being forced into their act of kufr. Then you make takfir of them.

In order to make takfir of an individual one has to be qualified in the matter of takfir.

(13) You have argued in your attempt to refute West Point's Combating Terrorism Center's report *Deadly Vanguards* that the conflict between some Iraqi Sunni and

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Shi'i groups was "initiated" by Shi'is. However, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and his Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'l Jihad began targeting Iraqi Shi'is very early, including in the August 2003 attack on the shrine of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib in al-Najaf. AQI and its affiliates and allies have killed many, many Muslim civilians/non-combatants. The *jihadi-takfiri* response seems to be limited to accusing the U.S., Mossad, and others of perpetrating the violence, with little to no evidence to support these claims. Why do AQI and its allies/affiliates kill so many Muslim non-combatants?

Collateral damage will naturally occur in any war, and in some scenarios it will be the majority of the deaths. The current wars the Muslims are fighting are within their own territory, so virtually all collateral damage will be of Muslims. Those killed by the other side are entirely Muslims.

I do not really know the history in Iraq as it has never been a focus for me. That part was probably written by Younes Abdullah Muhammad, who was the other author of that piece.

Some of those included in the study were Iraqi army officers, which in the minds of most Muslims and most Sunnis in Iraq are completely legitimate or at least understandable targets. If non-Muslims rely on their definition of a Muslim/non-combatant, then they can easily make these statements.

However, the *muxarrib* in Islaam is one who fights, finances the fight, gives strategic support to the fight, or gives moral support to the fight. That is why a lot of scholars consider every American to be a *maxarrib*. So, in kaafir terms 9-11 saw the deaths of roughly 3,000 civilians. According to many scholars, and not necessarily all of the ones with the mujaahidiin agree with this, on 9-11 3,000 combatants were killed.

The issue of targeting the Shi'a indiscriminately is not one that I am qualified to have an opinion on. It is not just some jihaadii shuyuukh who consider even the ignorant of the Rawaafidh to be upon a completely different religion than Islaam. If I was forced to make a decision in the matter, then I would not do it, but I also do not hold it against them.

When a kaafir studies Islaam, then they study even groups which no living Muslim considers to be within the fold of Islaam. This is part of the problem in the dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. I have found that most non-Muslim texts seem to portray the Khawaarij in a positive light, which is ironic considering the "alternative narrative" that someone proposed on your site.

The recent attack on the Ahmadiyyah in Pakistan saw the most backlash on Jihaadii forums, and was largely accepted or ignored on others. Until the non-Muslims understand why this would happen, they will continue to paint a false picture of the mujaahidiin which will lead to continued bloodshed. Backlash might not be the best word, because I do not think it resulted in anything negative for the mujaahidiin, but the jihaadii forums were the only place where any dialogue took place.

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(14) You have said that *jihadi-takfiri* preachers such as Anwar al-'Awlaqi have *ijazah* from "lesser-known" religious scholars or those "off the *minhaj*". Taking just him, who are these scholars (by name) and what are their qualifications to give *ijazah*? What do you mean by "off the *minhaj*?"
See: <http://azelin.wordpress.com/2010/06/22/an%E1%B9%A3ar-al-mujahidin-english-forum-an-essay-by-dr-akram-%E1%B8%A5ijazi-ibn-taymiyyah-reviews/#comments>

An ijaazah is basically a chain of people saying that so-and-so is qualified to teach a certain subject and it goes back to the Sahaabah and the Prophet, salaa Allahu alaihi wa salam. Anwar al-Awlaki's education can be read here: <http://cryptome.org/anwar-alawlaki/08-0812.htm>

"Minhaj" means methodology. A group called Salafiyyah-Jadiidah (Neo-Salafis) has gotten caught up in saying this shaikh or that shaikh is off of the proper methodology, and they do it in such an inconsistent manner that those outside of their circles do not take them seriously. They are most popular in the UK and in some Arab countries. When somebody is legitimately following some false way, then it is fine to say they are on an incorrect minhaj. However, the Salafiyyah-Jadiidah refuse to accept flexibility in rulings, so they frequently declare people to be on an incorrect methodology simply for differing with them in a matter of fiqh (jurisprudence).

(15) You commented to George Mason University's student newspaper, *Broadside*, that "if immigration laws were not such a pain" you would "not be here right now", referring to the United States. What, specifically, were you referring to as "a pain"? See: <http://www.connect2mason.com/content/former-mason-student-responsible-threats-south-park-creators>

I think question 10 is sufficient in this regard without delving too much into my personal life.

(16) In your response to Prof. Jarret Brachman you say that something, as an insult, is "retarded." Is this not offensive to those people, created by God in the religious viewpoint, who were born with mental handicaps?

See: <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=698>

Perhaps I should have used a different term. I thought about it when I wrote it and I decided that it was more important to convey the point in a manner that would stick in the minds of the reader. If it was wrong, then may Allah forgive me for it, and anyone who was offended then I ask them to forgive me as well.

(17) You argue in the aforementioned response to Brachman that you do not see a point in "dialoguing" with counter terrorism analysts? Were your responses to him/essays on him not, essentially, a type of "dialogue" with him, even if indirectly (which you acknowledge it could be seen as)? If it is "pointless," why do you even bother responding/writing about him?

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When I wrote that piece a lot of Muslims were trying to talk to CT analysts. They were outright advising them on their policies in an attempt to "outwit" them.

Yes, it is a form of dialogue, but dialogue in and of itself cannot be avoided. A lot of people commented on specific policies with no understanding that they could be helping their enemies. I wrote the piece with knowledge that he would read it and did not include things, which I considered to be harmful.

(18) Why did you/Revolution Muslim feel the need to issue a "clarification on the South Park issue" in late April as an addendum to your initial "press release"? Was this done to provide additional legal coverage for your "press release," which was interpreted by many as an implicit call or at least support for violence against those associated with production of that episode of South Park?

The "clarification" was issued as a way of changing the dialogue that was occurring. While the vast majority of what we got was death threats, a lot of non-Muslims were willing to discuss various issues and most of them came away with a much better understanding of the current conflict and other grievances that the Muslims hold. A lot of non-Muslims were also supportive of what we said, but the issue turned into a rally cry for people who openly hated Islaam before anything ever happened. Hence Ayaan Hirsi was the first person on CNN to be interviewed in the matter.

A large number of Christians actually began to notice how 'Isaa (Jesus), calaihis-salaam, is treated so vilely by that show. I would consider that a success as well, because this is something, which is just as bad in the hearts of the Muslims and maybe it will lead to his being treated better by American media.

A lot of what RM does is to educate non-Muslims on the demands and concerns of the Muslims. After 20+ years of conflict American presidents still have the audacity to go on television and lie to the American people about why other people attack them. They know very well why they get attacked, but for political reasons they will not say it. America's freedoms are probably the best thing about it. A lot of people are going to continue to die unless the dialogue in this war is one based on reality, so RM seeks to convey the reality of the situation to people.

(19) Do you feel your cause has won, in that Comedy Central originally aired an episode in 2001 showing Muhammad (where he was shown in a positive light), then following the Danish cartoons crisis Comedy Central blacked out Muhammad and then following your press release they bleeped out the mention of Muhammad's name as well as the speech at the end of the episode where the characters were making a speech, which had to do with giving into fear and intimidation?

I feel that we achieved a short term objective in the editing of the episode, and I think a dialogue has also started over this issue which will be productive in the long term in sha'a Allah. A lot of people naturally recognize that there is a difference between wrong speech and that speech which should be protected. European countries almost all have laws

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regarding a separation between these two realms of speech. The argument in favor of South Park is either the one of paranoia regarding slippery slopes, or it is the one of the sociopath who thinks there is nothing wrong with trying to harm someone with his words.

(20) You were offended at the possibility that South Park could have shown Muhammad, but were you also offended by what they actually did show in the episode? Ex: One hears the word "gook" uttered, Buddha snorting cocaine, Jesus downloading pornography and Moses being depicted as a super computer.

The content was the issue, not the actual depiction of the Prophet, salaa Allahu calaihi wa salam. If they simply drew him randomly, then the most that would happen is that maybe they would be contacted and be asked not to do it. Countless Muslims have drawn pictures of the Prophet, salaa Allahu calaihi wa salam, but the issue was of the insulting manner in which they depicted Muusaa (Moses), 'Isaa (Jesus), and Muhammād, calaihū assalaam. In the clarification we wrote about how none of the religious figures should be insulted like that, because this is something, which Allah has told us to abstain from in the Qur'aan.

(21) Had you ever watched a South Park episode before?

I used to watch South Park all of the time when I was a non-Muslim, but after accepting Islaam I stopped watching it due to the way it depicted 'Isaa (Jesus), calaihī-s-salaam, Muusaa (Moses), calaihī-s-salaām, and Allāh. Also, the content in general is not allowed in Islaam.

(22) How do you justify getting angry over the South Park possibly showing Muhammad when one can find pictures of Muhammad all over the Internet? Do you plan to boycott using the Internet?

By preventing South Park from airing that episode, more than 5,000,000 people were prevented from seeing our beloved Prophet, salaa Allahu calaihi wa salam, insulted. I doubt that all of the collective images on the internet have that kind of reach. Not even the Facebook event, which was created in response to the South Park affair even came close to having the same reach. Both episodes were completely blocked in at least one European country.

If I could figure out some way to address the other issues, then I would. All I can do is make supplications to Allah to remove them.

In retrospect there were a lot better ways to go about things, but I learned a lot about how to manipulate the media from it. I also learned some things about the psyche of the American Muslim and which things would be required to influence the largest group.

I will not reveal it, but I can think of one decision I made which if it had been different, then it would have forced some of the so-called "moderate" organizations to take a weaker stance, or to agree.

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(23) Your blog, the *Mujahid Blog*, was taken down. Will you create a new blog at some point?

I briefly recreated it, and upgraded it significantly (I am the one who did the RM design that was a bit fancier than what you see now). However, I decided against doing things, which might wind up in the news and have my name attached to them after the South Park incident. I do not like useless attention. Things like this I would consider productive to some degree, so I do not mind being associated with them.

When one's car breaking down winds up involving the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI, then they have attracted too much attention to themselves in my opinion. I was detained for about an hour when this happened to me. If I am ever broke, then I guess suing the city of Philadelphia is always an option.

Also, running a website is too time consuming, and it wound up taking me away from more important things. I was somewhat overwhelmed when my site got canceled, so I was actually quite relieved to see that it had been taken down.

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Al-Waktabah